



It's not a secret: Good jobs are available in Michigan. Closing the talent gap is key to filling them.

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No one should give up on finding a good job in Michigan. There is too much opportunity here. The challenge we face is making people aware of the jobs that are in demand, and point them to the education or training it takes to get them.

The recent Bridge article [Michigan's incredible shrinking workforce](#) shows the disconnect in a state where about 100,000 open positions are posted on the Pure Michigan Talent Connect website. The professional trades fields alone will account for more than 500,000 jobs by 2024, adding roughly 15,000 new jobs each year during that time.

And that's why we're taking a comprehensive approach to helping students and adults get the skills need to fill these good jobs.

And this is needed for our state's long-term success. The talent gap is not unique to Michigan. The state that best closes that gap will have a great advantage over others when employers look at sites to locate or expand. We're going to be that state. We're going to close the talent gap and create more and better jobs for Michiganders.

At Gov. Rick Snyder's direction, the Michigan Department of Talent and Economic Development has teamed up with the Michigan Department of Education and business, labor, economic development and education leaders to shrink the talent gap in Michigan.

The more we talked with these leaders, we realized much of the problem stems from a career awareness gap. Too many Michigan students don't know about all the pathways that lead to great careers. We want them to understand four-year degrees aren't the only pathways to strong, good-paying careers. And, not all four-year degrees will lead to good jobs.

Understand, we're not downplaying four-year university degrees. We are, however, "up-playing" all opportunities available for students after high school, including middle college, apprenticeship programs, community college or certification programs.

Together with our departments, and the more than 300 individuals and organizations formally known as the Michigan Career Pathways Alliance, we have established [17 initiatives](#) to create more opportunities for our young people to explore career options and highlight all pathways that lead to good-paying jobs. These initiatives build off the recommendations from Gov. Snyder's 21st Century Economy Commission and the 21st Century Education Commission reports.

Some of the initiatives include:

- Setting in place an extensive career exploration class before students begin selecting their elective classes in high school.
- Expanding career technical education programs statewide.
- Starting the discussion on equitable funding for career tech programs.
- Highlighting the flexibility in the Michigan Merit Curriculum to provide an opportunity for schools to integrate curriculum requirements with meaningful career programs, like geometry and carpentry, or healthcare and English-language arts or algebra and advanced manufacturing.

We are also continuing our Going PRO in Michigan campaign, designed to address and correct the dated perceptions of the professional trades. We're shattering the stereotypes of these careers among students and those who influence them. These are not the **dirty**, repetitive jobs of the past, but good-paying, **high-skilled** and high-tech careers in great demand.

We are working to increase the number of registered apprenticeships in the state – in the professional trades and beyond. Michigan received a \$2.5 million federal grant to expand apprenticeships to nontraditional fields and to under-served populations. This approach helps people gain skills without accumulating significant college debt.

U.S. Labor Secretary Alexander Acosta last month toured several innovative apprenticeship programs in west Michigan, including a first-in-the-nation consortium of healthcare providers and three community colleges for a medical assistant apprenticeship program that could be a model for other regions and states.

Michigan also is investing in adult workers because we know that jobs will require lifelong learning as technology boosts the rate of change. The Skilled Trades Training Fund operates through the Michigan Works! Association to train workers for new jobs, and allow employers to retrain existing workers for new and evolving posts.

The 2018 budget has \$29.4 million for Skilled Trades Training Funds grants, up from \$17.3 million a year earlier. The 2017 grants were aimed at creating 3,873 jobs and retaining 11,022 positions, with 481 employers taking part in program.

We've watched Michigan's economy grow stronger, creating about a half-million private sector jobs since the end of 2010. Our focus now should be keeping it strong, and making sure everyone who wants a rewarding, good-paying job has opportunity to get one. And, as Gov. Snyder said, there is more we can do and we are doing it.